



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ September 30, 2012 ✠

St. Gregory, Enlightener of Armenia (335)

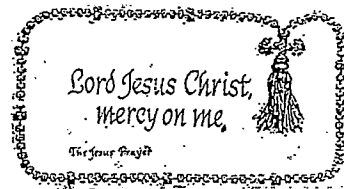
Martyrs Rhipsima & Gaiana of Armenia (4th C)

St. Jerome of Stridonium (420)

St. Michael, First Metropolitan of Kiev (992)

Not those that have riches, but those who do not know how to use them are condemned.

~ St. Ambrose of Milan



- ✠ Sat. October 6, 10:00am Divine Liturgy ~ St. Innocent of Moscow
- ✠ Next Sunday, October 7 – St. Symeon's Annual Parish Meeting after Liturgy
- ✠ October 28 - 35th Anniversary Celebration - Liturgy & Banquet

A disciple said to Elder Paisios: *Geronda, I have difficulties in my struggle. The Elder answered: "Do you ask for help from Jesus Christ or are you struggling alone? Have you told Christ of your weakness? You don't humble yourself, you don't ask Christ for help, and then you say, "I have difficulties in my struggle."*

"When one is humble and asks for help from Christ, He helps. Often a man makes an egotistical effort and this is why he gets no help. Throw your ego out, don't take it into account, and the Grace of God will dwell in you."

Hide your Virtues

✠ As for you, O faithful Christian, keep your ascetic labors secret; and take care, lest your tongue steal what your heart has toiled to acquire and hand it over to your enemies. If you wish your sins to be covered by the Lord (Psalm 31:1), do not display your virtues to men; for what we do with our virtues, God does with our sins.

St. Mark the Ascetic (5th C)

Feeding

✠ Because Christ was sacrificed, let each of us feed upon Him, and with alacrity and diligence partake of His sustenance; since He is given to all without grudging, and is in every one 'a well of water flowing to everlasting life.'

St. Athanasius the Great (325)

Do Not Despair

✠ Even if you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? If those attacked by many passions of soul and body endure patiently, do not out of negligence surrender their free will, and do not despair, they are saved.

--St. Peter of Damascus

Shun the World of Deceit

✠ Let us follow our Good Master; let us shun worldly desires; let us shun the world of deceit and its temporal ruler; let us give ourselves in purity to our Maker; let us honor our image; let us respect our call and change our lives. Why do we debase ourselves when our origins are lofty? Why do we cling to the visible realm?

St. Gregory the Theologian

Pearls of the Holy Fathers – 8:1

Behold, this is the true and Christian humility. In this you will be able to achieve victory over every vice, by attributing to God rather than to yourself the fact that you have won.

St. Martin of Braga

We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and that "the eyes of the Lord are looking on the good and the evil in every place." But we should believe this especially without any doubt when we are assisting at the work of God. To that end let us be mindful always of the Prophet's words; "Serve the Lord in fear" and again, "Sing praises wisely" and "In the sight of the Angels I will sing praise to Thee." Let us therefore consider how we ought to conduct ourselves in the sight of the Godhead and of His Angels, and let us take part in the psalmody in such a way that our mind may be in harmony with our voice.

St. Benedict of Nursia

Humility is the only thing we need; one can still fall having virtues other than humility — but with humility one does not fall.

Elder Herman of Mt. Athos

He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done in it.

St. John of the Ladder

We truly love God and keep His commandments if we restrain ourselves from our pleasures. For he who still abandons himself to unlawful desires certainly does not love God, since he contradicts Him in his own intentions. . . Therefore, he loves God truly, whose mind is not conquered by consent to evil delight. For the more one takes pleasure in lower things, the more he is separated from heavenly love.

St. Gregory the Great

The hour of death will come upon us, it will come, and we shall not escape it. May the prince of this world and of the air (cf. John 14:30; Eph. 2:2) find our misdeeds few and petty when he comes, so that he will not have good grounds for convicting us. Otherwise we shall weep in vain. 'For that servant who knew his lord's will and did not do it as a servant, shall be beaten with many stripes' (cf. Luke 12:47).

St. Hesychius the Priest

Do not seek the perfection of the law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.

St. Mark the Ascetic

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience.

St. John of the Ladder

Souls that love truth and God, that long with much hope and faith to put on Christ completely, do not need so much to be put in remembrance by others, nor do they endure, even for a while, to be deprived of the heavenly desire and of passionate affection to the Lord; but being wholly and entirely nailed to the cross of Christ, they perceive in themselves day by day a sense of spiritual advance towards the spiritual Bridegroom.

St. Macarius the Great

An elder was asked, 'How can I find God?' He said, 'In fasting, in watching, in labors, in devotion, and, above all, in discernment. I tell you, many have injured their bodies without discernment and have gone away from us having achieved nothing. Our mouths smell bad through fasting, we know the Scriptures by heart, we recite all the Psalms of David, but we have not that which God seeks: charity and humility.'

Apophthegmata Patrum (Anonymous Sayings)

On the Gift of the Holy Eucharist

“This Sacrament is a great gift of God, but it places a great responsibility for our life, our behavior, our attitude to God and people.”

On July 29, the commemoration day of the Holy Fathers of the Six Ecumenical Councils, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of Our Lady the Joy to All Who Sorrow in Moscow. At the Liturgy, Metropolitan Hilarion delivered the following homily:

‘In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

‘In today’s Reading of the Gospel, we heard the story of how our Lord Jesus Christ, at the request of His disciple, fed up a multitude of people with bread and fish. The Gospel speaks of five thousand men who were fed by the Lord, not counting women and children. So, we do not know the exact number of people. The Lord fed them with five thousand loaves and two fishes.

‘This miracle of the multiplication of loaves in a desert reminds us that the Lord is the Giver of every blessing, the Giver of both material and spiritual food. It is not accidental that every time before eating we ask the Lord to bless our meal and after the meal we thank Him for satisfying us with His earthly gifts and ask that He may not deprive us of His Heavenly Kingdom.

‘Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver of all blessings and it is He Who gives us food, even if we buy it in a grocery or cook it with our own hands.

‘In a quite different manner however, the Lord gives us Himself as the Bread which gives eternal life and gives us His Holy Blood as the source of water running into eternal life. And it is not accidental that from the very beginning of the Church of Christ on earth this miracle of the multiplication of the loaves was seen as the image and prototype of the Holy Eucharist which we received from the hands of the Lord Himself. We ask for bread and wine produced by human hands, but the Lord by His divine power turns them into His life-giving Body and His honorable Blood to feed not five or fifty or five hundred thousand but millions of people around the world – the people to whom the Lord Himself said, ‘I am the bread of life’ (Jn. 6:48). ‘I am the source of living water; whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst’ (cf. Jn. 4:14). The Holy Eucharist is the source of spiritual blessings which helps us in our earthly life to unite with the Lord Himself, while remaining in our material bodies.

‘There is a simple physical law: when man takes food, this food is digested by his organism. Particles of this food are absorbed by his flesh and blood to become part of his own flesh. When man takes in the Divine Bread – the Body of Christ, this material bread is miraculously united with the material body of man and the Body of Christ becomes part of our body, and the Blood of Christ becomes part of our blood. This is that ineffable and incomprehensible union between God and man which is possible only in the Christian Church and for the sake of which the Lord came to earth.

‘Holy Fathers say that the goal of Christian life is deification, that is, the union of man with God in which man, while remaining in his material body, becomes imbued with the presence and energies of God, in which man, while on earth, lives the life of the upper world. This happens to us in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. In this Sacrament we unite with the Lord and the Lord begins to live in us, begins, from within our own body, to feed us with His own Divine Body and His Divine Blood, thus enlivening and giving life to our human nature and burning the sinful principle present in each of us. This Sacrament is a great gift of God, but it places a great responsibility for our life, our behavior, our attitude to God and people.

'The Lord demands that we should fulfill His holy commandments, that we live by His laws, that the Gospel should be for us not just a book to read but the book with which we verify our everyday life. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is indissolubly linked with what happens before and after it. It is not accidental that the Church calls us to be thoroughly prepared for Communion, to purify our hearts through the Sacrament of Confession, to purify our minds through prayer and repentance, through the attentive and heartfelt participation in the Divine Eucharist. The Eucharist however is also linked with what happens after we have taken Communion and after we have been dismissed and come out of the church. Indeed, it is beyond the church that lies the space in which we should manifest our Christian love, our Christian courage, and in which we should do as it befits Christians. If we partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ but our life is not consistent with the Gospel's ideal, then this Sacrament proves to be, as St. Paul put it, 'in judgment' of us (see, 1 Cor. 11:28-29), like one of the Apostles, having partaken of the Last Supper, proved to be unworthy of that holy Gift. Whenever we come up to the Holy Cup, we remember this former Apostle and pray that we may never make his mistakes, never lapse into duality which led him to betrayal.

'Our love of God is tested outside the church walls where we encounter human grief, need, evil and treachery, where the Lord calls us to act in the way He Himself acted among people. In our everyday affairs we should emulate the Lord Himself, looking at Him as the image we should imitate.

'Whenever we partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ, we will pray that the Lord may give us strength to be good Christians in this world where Christian values have been forgotten by many, where the Gospel's Commandments are unknown to many. We will ask the Lord to fill our hearts with the grace and love which helps us to carry our cross of life, which helps us in all life situations to act as it befits Christians. Amen'.

On Discretion ~ Abba Cassian

"Discretion is a kind of acropolis and queen among the other virtues. She teaches him, who possesses her to shun all deficiency and excess; and always to travel along **the royal path** --- not allowing oneself either to be deceived *from the right* through excessive asceticism, reasonable though it might appear, or to be enticed *from the left* into indolence and laxity."

"Discretion is like an eye and lamp of the soul. It presents all things to a man as they are, precisely distinguishing unimportant things from those more important; and showing him which things are snares of his adversaries, and which things come from Divine Providence. This enables him to live in a God-pleasing manner, and to walk - without straying or stumbling - on the dark and rough path of this life --- following, and being guided by the light of discretion. It is discretion that consolidates virtues, and insures that they are - and are called - virtues. If disjoined from discretion, they cease to be virtues at all; and are, indeed, frequently reckoned to be vices." (*)

(*) The translators add the following clarification for the final sentence of this teaching:

"The meaning of this excellent point is that insofar as a person does not do what is good with discretion, he may end up performing a vice rather than a virtue; for example, offering alms for outward show is not a virtue, but a vice."

✘ **The Cross is the crown of victory. It has brought light to those blinded by ignorance. It has released those enslaved by sin. Indeed, it has redeemed the whole of mankind. Do not, then, be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; rather, glory in it! For it was not a mere man Who died for us, but the Son of God, God made man. ~ St. Cyril of Jerusalem (5th C)**

The Sacrament of Confession:

Not Three Times a Year

by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos & Fili,
Greece From, *Do You Have a Ticket?* (Ch. 11)

“As long as man is a slave of the Devil with his sin and unbelief, the evil one does not disturb him.”

“Wounds displayed in public will not grow worse, but will be healed” (St. John Climacus)

To the extent, then, my brother and fellow-sinner, that the Grace of the All-Compassionate God has helped you to perceive your sinfulness, to repent and make the great decision to confess, I give you one further piece of advice: do not postpone it even for a minute! You should be reconciled immediately with your Creator, Whom you have so greatly grieved and scorned. When a man happens to be with you and is troubled and scandalized, and does not speak to you, but has an aversion to you, you immediately run to him to reconcile with him. You get others to act as go-betweens, and many times you send some gift in order to restore the love and peace between you. You cannot sleep from the disquiet. If, then, it happens thus with people, how can you rest nonchalantly the moment you have so grieved our Heavenly Father and God? If, again, you suffer from a serious illness and they inform you that there is a chance that you may die, do you remain carefree? Certainly not! You run to doctors, you spend money, you leave aside your tasks, however pressing they may be, and you ask in agony: “What will become of me? Am I at risk? Am I seriously ill?” etc.

But there is also something very important that you should know. If you succeed in confessing and being washed of the uncleanness of your sins with the Grace of the Holy Spirit, do not think that they are all now at an end, that “this is as far as they went.” No, do not ever believe this! It is precisely now that the great journey, the great struggle, begins. With your confession you made an agreement with God in some way and promised that you would now belong to His army, to His followers, to His faithful children. And this army is in a continuous war and consequently you will be at war non-stop, albeit a spiritual war. Be sure you understand this.

When a villager sits quietly and humbly and works on his land, and looks after his animals and

does not bother anyone, then no one is afraid of him, no one disturbs him. But if this villager becomes rebellious and gathers other men together, and they take up weapons and head for the hills, terrorizing the world and threatening the state and the government, then what happens? The authorities are aroused and the army comes to reinforce them, and a continuous war is brought about, until the rebels are annihilated.

So it is with repentance and spiritual warfare. As long as man is a slave of the Devil with his sin and unbelief, the evil one does not disturb him. But when he rebels, that is, repents (for repentance in essence is a spiritual uprising to separate oneself from the slavery of sin), then the Devil disturbs him and is afraid of losing his slave, and for this reason “turns every stone” in order to stave off the redemption of mankind by devising temptations and unbearable difficulties. In this way, then, does the good and spiritual army of God—His Church Militant, as She is typically called—fight as a whole and resist the Devil and his minions.

However, as you know, war is not always without bloodshed. Many are killed, and more are wounded. So also after confession, you can be wounded and injured. This is why you must always run again immediately to the spiritual surgery, to find the Priest, to show him your wound, and to tell him how you were wounded, and he, with the enlightenment of God, will wash your wound and put the appropriate remedies on it, and give you the spiritual prescription that you must apply in order to get well.

Every time, that is, when you fall because of the envy of the Devil, and out of your infirmity and inexperience, do not despair. Run quickly! Do not postpone it! Do not let the wound putrefy and create other wounds, which will gradually bring on your death. Do not go to confession only on the Great Feasts, as the majority of people are accustomed—quite wrongly—to doing. On Pascha, Nativity and during the Dormition Fast one sees them running (and particularly at the last minute, after they have prepared everything in the house) in great haste, without awareness and true repentance, to tell the confessor some of those sins which in their opinion should be mentioned. They say with a clear conscience, “That’s over with,” and return to their homes, without any change in their lives or their ideas, since the life-giving Grace of the Holy Spirit did not fill their hearts and did not give them spiritual power. They remain as they were before: dead.

But I ask you: When your head is hurting, do you not take an aspirin to get rid of it? Can it be that you wait three times a year to take it? Is it not irrational that while we look after the body, and quite excessively at that (the body which will be buried in the earth in a few years and eaten by worms), on the other hand we leave our soul vacant and unprotected against the onslaughts of the Devil, who makes it his slave and after death takes it with him to Hell forever?

We should confess, therefore, on a very regular basis. Let us ask forgiveness of God, through the confessor, even for the smallest sins, which, however small they may appear, gradually become entire mountains that close our path to the Kingdom of Heaven. When a certain wayfarer was asked where his stride was most impeded, he replied that he was hindered to an unimaginable degree in the wilderness, because his shoes gradually filled with sand and he could not walk. Let us not forget, furthermore, that however large a ship may be, not much is needed for it to sink: a hole that is small, but will not be closed in a timely manner, is enough to become the problem. And a sheet that is completely white does not need much dirt on it for you to call it filthy; a single smudge is sufficient for it to become dirty.

St. Nicodemus the Haghiorite, in examining the subject of small (forgivable) and great (deadly) sins, reaches the following conclusions:

- (1) "...Many small sins make a big one... *when a person despises the small as small.*"
- (2) "...All sins are condemned equally, because the Lord said: 'whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin' (St. John 8:34)."
- (3) "...Both the small sin and the great are equally a transgression of the law, according to St. John: 'sin is the transgression of the law' (I John 3:4) and disobedience to the Son: 'he that believeth not the Son shall not see life' (St. John 3:36)."
- (4) "...And the small sin becomes great when it dominates the one who commits it: 'for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage' (II Peter 2:19)."
- (5) "...The beam and the mote, that is, the great sin and the small, differ insofar as they do not receive the same punishment, but they do not differ insofar as they cast those who commit them out of the Kingdom of Heaven."

So then, my brother, do not confess three times a year, even for form's sake. Do not let so much

time pass, for who knows when death will find you before you have relieved your soul of the weight of your sins? Death is something about which no one knows when it will come. It could be now, it could be after a short while, it could be tomorrow: Will you be given time, I wonder, before you die to say what burdens you, or will you go with your sins to Hell forever?

Do not leave sin inside you, my brother, lest it "takes root" and becomes a tree, which is subsequently uprooted only with difficulty. While your sins are still a small plant, extract them immediately, for that is easy. Do not put it off. Cast out at once whatever evil the Devil sows in you, and destroy it; lest it lingers. In this case the Demon will take fright and fall into despair, and he will leave you in peace, because he knows that you will uproot with confession everything he is going to plant, and so what reason does he have for bothering?

St. Nicodemus writes very charmingly: "Storks have a custom of not returning to the place where they have destroyed their nests. So it is with the demons: they withdraw from one who confesses frequently, because by frequent confession he destroys their nests and nets, as the demons themselves said to a virtuous man, how they have no power over one who confesses frequently, nor any place in him."

When you are accustomed to confessing regularly, then you will learn also to pay more attention to your soul. You will learn to look after it and cleanse it so that the Triune God may be united with it. Your heart will always be pure and you will see God noetically and taste Paradise even from earth, because the Lord said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (St. Matthew 5:8).

I tell you again, my brother, do not be like those unfortunate Christians who, when the Great Feasts arrive (Pascha, Nativity), see to it that for many days they prepare the house and pastries, procure different foods, new clothes, etc., and who run on the final day, for form's sake, to confession, become impatient when they cannot accomplish this quickly, and get agitated, only to end up telling some of their sins in a hasty and impromptu manner, without repentance, and leave with their conscience supposedly clear that "it's over and done with." If confession were like that, then alas and woe for us! Where is the concentration? Where is the repentance?

WISDOM*God does His work at passing on wisdom in community.*

Years ago as I began reading about the Orthodox Church, I kept coming across a very familiar word, but the Orthodox were using it in a way that seemed strange to me.

The word was "wisdom." I saw it in the writings of the ancient Fathers, I saw it in the contemporary writings of the Orthodox theologians, and I even saw it used in the Divine Liturgy. But where I was used to seeing words like "commandments" and "spiritual law" and even "principles," the Orthodox used the word "wisdom." Now, to be sure the Orthodox used these other words as well, but not as often as "wisdom." The more I learned, the more I saw the "wisdom" in emphasizing "wisdom."

You can't get wisdom from a book. Oh, you can read about it and you can contemplate it, but wisdom needs two indispensable elements to blossom - time and example. I think that's why wisdom is so often in such short supply, because to truly arrive at wisdom requires patience and humility. It's also why the Lord has always chosen to do His saving work in a community, and not just as mere individuals. God does His work at passing on wisdom in community.

In the Hebrew Bible, God chose the nation of Israel to communicate His wisdom, His clear path to a full and healthy life. In the New Testament, God works in His Church, in the new community that bears His Name, to bring us all together and to build wisdom within us. We simply cannot enter fully into the wisdom of the timeless Orthodox faith cut off from the regular interaction with one another. Our spiritual lives will be stunted and impoverished by our disconnect from the community of Faith because this is where the "school of eternal life" is best experienced and learned. This is where we will get wisdom.

Some confuse wisdom with being shrewd. Others mistake wisdom with being old in age. Some will even confuse education with wisdom. But none of these other attributes really capture the power of true wisdom. I have known too many shrewd business men who were anything but wise. I have seen too many so-called mature people who acted like they were still teenagers. And I have seen too many PhD's who were more foolish than some who never graduated high school. No, wisdom is something much more than any of this.

I pray you will come to wisdom, true wisdom, in your life.

Fr. Barnabas Powell, STS. RAPHAEL, NICHOLAS & IRENE, Cummings, GA

God believes in us!

A famous Orthodox Bishop wrote, "the news that God believes in each of us, believes in those who do not believe in themselves, believes in us even when we do not believe in ourselves so much that He was prepared to become one of us and die for us, knowing that it is not in vain, because man, not mankind, but each man, each woman, each person is worthy of being entrusted with the life and the death of God. We must bring that into the world: this divine witness that God believes in us and in all of us, in the believers as He does in the unbelievers, that He believes in man and is ready to pay the cost of this belief with His blood, the witness but not only the words, but the deeds, that will make people believe in the love of God that abides in our heart lives, not within our Christian community alone, but wide enough, powerful enough to engulf all people and all hatred..."

" And we are to go into the world, to bring this witness, this message, these good tidings, this Gospel in order that people may again believe in themselves and look up to God and believe in His belief, in love and discover the God of Love, that they may begin to live.

“Christians are not a “People of the Book.” – Part 2

On the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets

Fr. Stephen Freeman, Glory to God for All Things Blog 8/28/2012

The rather “mechanical” versions and explanations of inspiration (some fundamentalists seem to compete as to who can say “infallible” in the most absolute sense) are all quite misleading. They have created a very false impression of the Bible and made of it something it is not. In many ways, the Protestant groups who engage in this have no sense whatsoever of the nature of Scripture. In particular, they have a tendency to treat the Bible as a “stand alone” concept. It is the “Word of God,” etc., and authoritative over everyone and in every way.

What is lacking is to see the Bible properly as an organic element of the life of the One Church. It does not “change” outside of that context, but it is no longer what it is intended to be. An icon in a museum exhibit is still an icon, but it has been turned into “art” and no longer has the proper context of veneration, etc. Those who use the Scriptures to “beat people over the head” who are not even Christians, have brought the Scriptures into ill repute. They have become despised by significant segments of the population (and misunderstood by most). I rarely meet anyone, including so-called “Bible-believers” who has the faintest clue about the Scriptures.

St. Irenaeus believed there was an unbroken line of tradition from the apostles, to those they mentored, and eventually down to himself and other Christian leaders. The Gnostics interpreted the Scriptures according to their own tradition. “In doing so, however,” Irenaeus warned, “they disregard the order and connection of the Scriptures and ... dismember and destroy the truth.” So while their biblical theology may at first appear to be the precious jewel of orthodoxy, it was actually an imitation in glass. Put together properly, Irenaeus said, the parts of Scripture were like a mosaic in which the gems or tiles form the portrait of a king. But the Gnostics rearranged the tiles into the form of a dog or fox.

Question on the Church Fathers to Fr. Stephen:

Q. *I have read that the Orthodox do not consider the age of Church Fathers to be over and includes later influential writers other than the Apostolic, Greek, Latin, and Desert Fathers. However, I cannot recall that I have every noted one of these “other” Fathers being referenced in anything I have every read or listened to. Who are the later influential writers that are included in the category of Fathers by the Orthodox churches? Also, how is it decided who is added to this special group? Is there an established process?*

A. The Orthodox have never had any process by which we declare someone or their writings to be “of the Fathers.” It’s more a general consensus of the Church (and therefore terribly frustrating for those who want more formal assurance for their religious anxieties). When a writer is also canonized as a Saint (such as St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, or St. Silouan of Mt. Athos, etc.) there writings are certainly granted a certain weight. But Saints can be wrong about things, too. So their writings are read in the light of the larger life of the Church. The life of the Saint who wrote them, and the context in which they were written cannot be ignored. Thus, for me, there are a number of writings by Saints during the period some call the “Western Captivity” of the Church that help me understand why their works seem so un-Orthodox-like in many ways...

There are contemporary figures whose writings enjoy a great deal of authority – though very few whose work is not challenged by others within the Orthodox world...

Orthodox life is primarily lived in worship and in prayer. If we are firmly grounded in that part of our life, then we will be able to read things with more clarity. If this part of our life is weak, everything else will be weak. “A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian.”